

Connecting the Dots

Understanding the External Review Team Program's Impact and Outcomes

**A presentation to the South Carolina
Education Oversight Committee**

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Bottom line question guiding our review:

How does the ERT Program contribute to change in SC schools in a manner that supports student achievement?

Three core questions:

- 1. What are the most consistent findings to emerge from each of the review activities?**
- 2. Based on data from across review activities, what is the ERT Program doing right?**
- 3. Based on data from across review activities, where does the ERT Program need additional support or modification?**

Data supporting the findings

- **Review of ERT-like programs in 5 other states**
- **Study of school- and student-level achievement scores in ERT reviewed schools:**
 - **Each year since 2001-02 school year**
 - **Focused examination of 2001-02 cohort**

Data sources (continued)

- **Analysis of ERT reports**
- **Online surveys of 137 ERT members and 52 school participants**
- **Interviews with 10 ERT members and 11 principals**
- **Site visits of 9 schools participating in reviews**



**What are the
key findings that emerge
from each review activity?**

5-State Review

- Although many features of review *teams* are similar, no two states carry out the review *process* the same way
- Because of differences in local contexts, no “right way” to conduct reviews
- Schools’ needs greater than states’ capacities

Analysis of Performance Data

- **Considerable variation in unsatisfactory schools**
- **2 main groups of unsatisfactory schools:**
 - **Chronic (schools that remain unsatisfactory)**
 - **Improved (schools that demonstrate some improvement)**
- **Variation even within chronically unsatisfactory schools**
 - **Schools whose performance remains unchanged**
 - **Schools that improve, but not enough**

Examination of ERT reports

- **A different set of deficiencies are at work in continued Unsatisfactory schools**
 - **Deeper, more systemic problems (curriculum, standards alignment, etc.)**

Results of Surveys and Interviews

- **Broad support for the ERT process**
- **Smaller, specific issues raised**
- **Some differences by level of school visited, and by team member background**
- **Principals/coordinators tended to rate lower than ERT members**

Results of Site Visits

- Findings from other data sources confirmed and expanded
- Context strongly emphasized (teacher/principal turnover, changes in student population)
 - ERT process acknowledged as focusing school efforts

What is the ERT Program doing right?

Creating a sound structure for the Program's work

- **Identification and selection of ERT members**
- **Solid content, format, and length of training**
- **Clear channel of communication within team, as well as with schools and SDE**

Providing schools with experts

- **Small, targeted teams appropriate to the work at hand**
- **Variety of knowledge and backgrounds**
- **Experienced educators**
- **Individuals and teams credited as creating a collaborative process**

Providing a structure and means for improvement

- **Areas of review (curriculum and instruction, governance, leadership, professional development) help focus school attention**
- **Process of review brings a sense of urgency for schools**

Providing resources

- **Inherent relationship noted among larger accountability efforts, the ERT process, and school improvement**
- **Good follow through from ERT recommendations to implementation**
 - **Targeted professional development that meets schools' core gaps**
 - **Teacher Specialists On Site particularly appreciated**

Evolving, improving process

➤ ERT members and/or principals note:

- Improvement in instrument
- Schools more prepared
- Teams more experienced
- Training improved



Where does the ERT Program need additional support and modification?

Tailored approach

- **Variations in school leadership and staffing (e.g., some schools with inexperienced or new principals, schools with high turnover)**
- **Middle schools appear to have special challenges and needs that the ERT Program may not be addressing**
- **Some Unsatisfactory schools have deeper problems than others, may require different approach**

Reducing the ERT timeline

- **18 months between performance data triggering ERT visit and implementation of recommendations:**
 - **Wait for student performance data**
 - **Schedule training**
 - **Schedule visits**
 - **Reporting**
 - **Placement of teacher specialists**

Refining communication

- **Allow ERTs to submit preliminary reports to schools to begin improvement efforts**
- **Provide formal feedback for ERT members on the quality and relevance of their recommendations**
- **Openly communicate information about the ERT members and process with other stakeholders**

Placing a stronger emphasis on instruction

- **Less focus on paperwork, documentation of policies, and “paper trails”**
- **More direct ties between assessment indicators and quality instruction**
- **More monitoring of instruction (although controversial); conducting unannounced visits**

Restructuring ERT's as a part of the implementation process

- **ERT's as part of schools' continuous improvement efforts throughout the school year**
 - Revisit schools periodically
 - Check on plans, progress
- **One team member sufficient**

Further observations

- **ERT Program's impact can be better understood if improved data collection and management systems are in place**
 - **Technology-based system to input and track ERT reports and recommendations**
 - **Electronic records of visits and participants**

Further observations (continued)

- **More rigorous design can be used to document ERT Program outcomes**
 - **E.g., Establish benchmarks for performance improvement**
 - **E.g., Create and deploy different versions of review instrument to explore whether instruction should be more closely examined**
 - **E.g., Create and deploy different kinds of reviews based on school needs**

Lingering questions that impact the ERT Program

- **How to deal with the high turnover in teachers and principal leadership?**
- **Recognition of school improvement even if it does not hit the mark?**
- **The larger framework for accountability hinders school progress (hard hit student populations, movement of students to better-performing schools).**

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